

Subject : ANS Purchase of Manhattan Island
medal -- struck or cast?

Sharpe, Henry D.
[Providence, RI]

1926

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Box 1385

June 1-26

Mr. Howland Wood. Secy

Amer. Numismatic Society
New York

My dear Howland.

The "Purchase of Manhattan Island" Medal

has duly arrived, and its design greatly impresses me.

Am I right in thinking that the medal is cast and
not struck? It seems to me that a medal, to be

made right, should be struck, and not cast.

Nothing impresses one more
or less ignorance on the subject. Generally speaking
has it been the custom of great medal makers to

shake their medals or to cast them. Did
Bonnarts Belline follow either one practice; or both, and
if so, to what degree of each.

Any information you can give me as to the
practice of the best one ~~and the~~^{is the} or the handsome of
the art, would be appreciated.

It is a long time since I had the pleasure
of seeing you.

When again in Providence, you must visit
the new Museum Building & the School of Design.
it is a beautiful structure

Fondly yours // Henry W. Sharpe

June 3rd, 1926

Henry D. Sharpe, Esq.
Box 1383
Providence, R.I.

Dear Mr. Sharpe:

I was very glad to receive your letter, and trust I shall run across you somewhere some time, but if I remember rightly, the last time that I saw you was on a train from New York to Boston - and before then, on Lake Lomond!

The purchase of Manhattan Island medal is struck and not cast. You may have been misled because the finish, as with most modern medals, is done by a sandblast after striking. This puts on a somewhat rough surface. Nearly every modern medal is struck - the exceptions being very large medals, medals where but very few copies are made, and sometimes through the whim of the artist or publisher.

The first medals - that is, in the time of the Renaissance, were cast, as the stamping press was not then sufficiently developed, and also the casting process was more under the supervision of the artist. If I remember correctly, medals were struck by machinery about 1500, but it was not until some time in the seventeenth century that it became a common practice. A struck medal involves, or did involve in those days, a different procedure as it necessitated the direct cutting into the die, while cast medals today could be made by modelling in wax. Of course, coins have always been struck. Naturally, there are a few exceptions.

Cellini made several coin designs, being an "all-round man", probably cut the actual dies. As far as I know, his medals were all cast.

In recent years, the whole practice of medal-making has been revolutionized. Formerly, every medallist had to be a die engraver, and many technically able men were but mediocre artists. Today, hardly a medal maker can cut a die. Nowadays, anybody who can model take a "fling" at making medals as all one has to do is to model in low relief and have his design put on a reducing machine, and the die is cut direct from the large size medal by a mechanical process. This is worked both ways. Superior artists who could not otherwise cut dies have been able to reproduce excellent medals. Also, anyone who thinks he can model, can do likewise.

Henry D. Sharpe, Esq.

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I have heard much of the new Museum building
of the School of Design. I always visit the School
when in Providence, not only because I admire and
enjoy it, but I have a sentiment concerning it, as
I went there on Sunday mornings and many evenings
for a number of years.

Very truly yours,

Curator